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ABSTRACT

Difficulties in staffing ever increasing numbers of college reading improvement programs makes this an area in which paraprofessionals can be of great value. One source of personnel for college reading programs, not strictly paraprofessional but called that for lack of a more explicit term, is graduate students in reading education. Training should include enrollment in a reading improvement course, brief practice teaching experiences, and familiarity with measurement instruments and with instructional materials. The paraprofessional should be able to assist students with most reading laboratory activities and should be able to assist instructors with diagnosis and individual program planning. Such a program as described was begun by the author and has been successful over a 3-year period, leading him to recommend similar programs in other places. A reading list for paraprofessionals and a bibliography are included. (MS)

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THE TRAINING AND USE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS IN THE COLLEGE READING PROGRAM

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The use of the tutor and paraprofessional has long been discussed in the literature in the elementary and secondary schools, and in the clinic; but their use in the college reading program is not discussed or to be found in the literature except for a paper delivered at the North Central Reading Association in 1962 by Ernest Kinne (1), and in an article in the Journal of Reading and in The Western College Reading Association Yearbook, Volume 2 by Martha Maxwell (2) and also some general articles about the training of reading teachers. It would seem one can only assume that this particular topic is not considered an "issue" in the field of reading education.

Few universities which offer a methods course in the teaching of reading at the junior college, college, or university level. Yet, we are faced with the acute problem of too many students who wish to enroll in a reading improvement course and an inadequate supply of qualified and trained instructors to teach these courses.

Martha Maxwell (3) states that one of her functions at the University of California is to set up a training program for high school and college reading specialists. She found that most graduate students are far more interested in preparing to work with the younger, culturally different child who needs remedial help, than they are in preparing older students to get into and remain in college.

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Although college and university reading improvement programs are expanding, there seems to be no rush at the university level to train people as college reading specialists.

Frustration is the key word when a search is made to hire reading specialists to teach in a college reading program. I have found that in order to staff a reading program it is necessary (1) to train my own instructors, (2) use the reading specialists available on the university faculty, who already are teaching a full load of methods courses and do this as a side-line or for extra money, or (3) train paraprofessionals to assist in the operation of the program. I might add that this lack of trained college reading specialists is not getting better, but in many areas, worse.

When the decision is made to use and train a person as a paraprofessional, we must begin to define the role the person will serve in the reading program. Such questions as: Should selection be made from persons who have a B.A., or have at least some college training be selected? Should graduate students in reading only be used? Should the person under consideration have any training in reading education, and if so, at what level? What role will the paraprofessional play in the program? All of these questions and many more need to be considered and explored for answers before any selection process or training program begins.

In choosing personnel for such a program, consideration must be given to the basic philosophy of your reading program and the instructors involved, as the instructor can make or break a program. The instructor's attitude toward the course is as equally important as his knowledge of reading. As Staiger (4) points out so wisely a negative person or a compulsive talker does not belong in a course in which attitudes toward

reading and study are being developed and in which silent reading is being practiced.

Our first selection for additional personnel in our program was narrowed down to the graduate students enrolled in the Master of Arts in Reading Education. These students had some basic work in reading, were in residence at the university, and had some classroom experience either at the elementary or secondary level. None of these students had any experience in teaching reading at the post-secondary level, but several of them were interested in teaching at this level, and wanted some experience as they were looking to the junior college for future employment. Another reason for this choice was that we needed instructors trained to run a complete program of more than one or two sections of reading improvement at a time.

We felt that one of the best ways to begin the training process for these students was for them to take the reading improvement course. It is difficult- though not impossible, to teach something you do not know yourself. Therefore, being enrolled in and taking the reading improvement course exposed the student to both sides of the coin - a student in a learning situation and as an observer of the teaching methods used in the program.

After completion of the reading improvement course, each student was placed under the supervision of an experienced instructor - somewhat similar to a student teaching experience. He was then given the responsibility, under supervision, of teaching certain areas of the program. For example, he may be asked to prepare a session on previewing or textbook reading. The material was prepared by the student, checked by the instructor, discussed by them both for possible deletions or additions, and then the student

presented the lesson to the class. Using this method of training allowed us to select the best candidates to become instructors in the program.

Our supply of M.A. candidates was by no means endless. We were faced with an individualized reading program in name only, instructors, but no trained personnel to assist the instructors in order to allow them to really individualize the program to fit the needs of each student in the class. Therefore we began the process of selecting undergraduates from those who had taken the reading improvement program and had shown some interest in this type of work as a paraprofessional. We then developed a training program to train them in certain critical areas in order to release the instructors for more time with individual students.

In order to develop an effective training program we surveyed our student population to determine the areas they felt needed more concentration and improvement in the program. We found that they wanted more individual help in using materials, machinery and in study techniques. They also wanted more supervised practice time outside of the regular class session.

With this information in hand, and also the needs the instructors felt were important, we developed a training sequence for, what you can call for the lack of a better name, the paraprofessional.

In developing our training sequence and in selecting undergraduates to work in the program we tried as much as possible to keep within a reasonable set of criteria. Realizing that many undergraduates had no training in reading or at best had completed a reading improvement course we needed to give them some basic foundation in reading.

We required each candidate to read selected passages from The Improvement of College Reading (5). For example: The Reading Improvement Program, Page 5; A Key To Better Reading (6) Chapter 2, What to Do with a Page of

Print?; How To Study In College (7), Chapter 6, How to Read a Textbook. For a complete list of the required readings see Appendix A.

We chose this type of material rather than material from the literature simply because we were not training these students to become reading teachers, but rather to assist the instructor wherever possible, and have an overview of reading from the student's point of view. Therefore, it was felt that this material, written to the student, would be more understandable and profitable reading. Pre-reading questions were developed for each reading so that the candidate had some direction and purpose for his reading and could answer these questions when queried by the instructor and discuss it with him if this was felt to be necessary.

We spent several sessions with the paraprofessional on the use and abuse of the reading accelerator, the controlled reader, and the skimmer and scanner. They were also required to read carefully the instructor's manuals for each of these instruments.

Test administration and scoring is time consuming and we felt that this was an area where pressure could be taken from the instructors. The Nelson-Denny Reading Test is straightforward and not too difficult to administer. The self-scoring answer sheets make scoring the test a fairly simple operation. The Survey of Reading/Study Efficiency by Frank Christ (8) is a self-scoring instrument and used with our first year students only. The Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes by Brown and Holtzman (9) is used with second year students and above and must be hand scored and is a rather time consuming task. The Reading Versatility Test is also administered to all students in the program. The paraprofessionals were trained to administer and score all of these instruments. Test interpretations were done by the instructors. The time saved in having the paraprofessional

administer and score these tests was overwhelming. Students who entered the program after the initial testing had been given were administered the tests by the paraprofessionals outside of class time and the results passed on to the instructor so that he could plan a program and analyze the student's reading needs before the next class meeting.

Another area where we found the paraprofessional can be easily trained and most helpful to an instructor is in study skills. Since most of the undergraduates we selected were not education majors, but had academic or technical majors, we found them to be a valuable asset in helping students with study skill techniques in their academic areas of common interest. Since we do not advocate one study technique to the exclusion of any other, this affords an opportunity for the paraprofessional to develop a technique which was workable and could be used by other students in the same academic areas.

A problem in our reading program was affording students enrolled extra time outside of the regular classes for practice and more individual attention. The paraprofessional helped us to solve this problem by allowing the establishment of a reading laboratory which operated outside of the regular class schedule. This lab allowed students to do additional practice, work with machinery or do assignments under supervision that had been given by the instructor. The paraprofessional assisted the students in locating the proper material, helping with the machinery, and also working with him on an individual basis with certain skill development as outlined by the instructor. The use of the paraprofessional in running and supervising the lab allowed the instructors more latitude in their class assignments and, if they so desired, could assign a particular task for a student to complete in the lab.

In our program we allow students to check out material on an overnight basis. The paraprofessional became our librarian. He was also used as a clerk to prepare word-counts for material that needed them, pacer setting charts, answer keys, and made sure that a copy of each item was affixed to each piece of material that required it. He typed teacher made material and did the necessary clerical work to make them ready for classroom use.

A training technique which we found to be an excellent device which required the paraprofessional to become familiar with the materials in the Center and contribute a valuable asset to the program was to have them develop specific bibliographies based on skill development areas or academic subject areas.

This activity required the paraprofessional to classify materials under several types of classifications - academic subjects or skill areas. The first bibliography to be developed was done in the area of academic subjects. Each piece of material was examined and the readings contained in the material were classified under the proper academic area. (See Appendix B) A second bibliography was developed along the lines of skill development areas and classification. (See Appendix C).

We found these materials to be extremely valuable in assisting both the instructor and the student. If, for example, an instructor wanted a student to do independent reading and further development in the area of reading for details, he could refer the student to the skill area classification list or have the paraprofessional give the student assistance.

The paraprofessional also accepted the responsibility of checking the student's work and giving further direction or report the results to the instructor.

Periodic meetings or seminars were held with the paraprofessionals and the instructors to discuss problems that may have arisen or to discuss and develop teacher-made materials that could be used in study skills areas, certain skill areas.

The training program outlined here has been in effect for three years. We have found definite advantages in the use of the paraprofessional in our program. In fact, I could go so far as to say that if we had not trained paraprofessionals our program would not be as effective or as individualized as it is. He frees instructors from the numerous clerical tasks involved in such a course, (2) he assits the instructor with small groups of students, (3) he supervises the lab and works there directly with students, (4) he allows the instructional staff to run an individualized program, (5) he assists the students in the use of the hardware used in the program, and (6) he insures a smooth running program that has expanded and drawn because of the paraprofessional.

We hesitate many times in the field of reading to use "unskilled" or untrained people because we look upon the area as one in which the person who instructs should be a specialist. This is true, but the specialist, if he is to be effective and help students function successfully, needs some help. The alternative of training a person to give this help has proven to be both practical and successful. It is a matter of priorities - what can be done to relieve the instructor to do his job - help each student in reading improvement reach his full reading potential. I do not advocate that the paraprofessional be a teacher, but a partner in the teaching process to aid both the student and the instructor.

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APPENDIX A

READING LIST FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

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APPENDIX B

Academic Subjects (cont'd)

Biography	
Cosper	p. 75 and p. 147
Weeden	p. 5 and p. 9
Glock	p. 157 and p. 240
Herr	p. 65, p. 229 and p. 233
McDonald	See introduction
Biology	
Judson	p. 109, p. 152 and p. 344
Beringause	p. 48, p. 126 and p. 216
Cosper	p. 109, p. 235 and p. 271
Wedeen (1)	p. 127 and p. 132
Wedeen (2)	p. 95, p. 100 and p. 135
Christ	p. 23
Ehrlich	p. 209 and p. 274
Business	
Judson	p. 58 and p. 218
Beringause	p. 22, p. 27, p. 33, p. 100, p. 106, p. 111, p. 187, p. 192 and p. 198
Glock	p. 57
Lewis	p. 104
McDonald	p. 61, p. 89, p. 195 and p. 269
Chemistry	
Cherington	pp. 29 - 33 and pp. 100 - 104
Beringause	p. 62, p. 144 and p. 233
Wedeen (1)	p. 137 and p. 142
Wedeen (2)	p. 105
Christ	p. 27
Communication	
Cosper	p. 137
Leedy	p. 119 and p. 193

APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX C

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3. CRITICAL READING

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